

Action group challenges gypsies' 'right' to event

THE COTSWOLDS
Caroline Fisher



RESIDENTS campaigning to tighten control of Stow Horse Fair have taken newly-elected Gypsy Council president Vera Norwood to task.

Stow and Mangersbury Action Group (SMAG) has hit back at comments made by Miss Norwood, who championed the controversial twice-yearly gypsy fair in the *Echo*.

She has recently become the first ever non-gypsy to lead the national body. She declared gypsies needed someone to fight for them as they

were discriminated against. And she claimed the fair stuck to dates granted in Stow's Royal Charter over 500 years ago. But SMAG chairman Robert Fisher believes that is incorrect.

He said: "Stow Charter belongs to the people of Stow through the recent purchase by Stow Town Council and grants no rights whatsoever to the gypsies or travellers."

SMAG has campaigned to shorten the time gypsies occupy the field, for the official one-day fair, as it says this sparks problems.

Mr Fisher said: "Caravans arrive in the area, sometimes weeks ahead of the events, camping on verges and private property, leaving rubbish and debris, fouling

fields and gardens, and causing disturbance and disruption to local people.

"Local shops are closed either through fear or because shoppers avoid the town.

"All this at the cost of the council taxpayer, who foots the bill for policing and clearing up the mess, although the field owners charge substantial entry fees."

Speaking in the *Echo* last week Miss Norwood said: "The gypsies stick to the dates granted by the Royal Charter over 500 years ago and have a right to be here.

"Somebody needs to fight for them as other ethnic groups aren't treated in the same way."

The political activist said she was "honoured and amazed" to be asked to lead the Gypsy Council.



Gypsy Council president Vera Norwood

Caroline Fisher - 01608 659403 - caroline.fisher@glosmedia.co.uk

NOV 4 2011

GLoucestershire Echo